

## **Bangladesh**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Capital:** Dhaka

**Location:** Southern Asia, bordering the Bay of Bengal, between Burma and India

**Climate:** tropical; mild winter (October to March); hot, humid summer (March to June); humid, warm rainy monsoon (June to October)

**Population:** 144,319,628 (July 2005 est.)

**Ethnic Make-up:** Bengali 98%, tribal groups, non-Bengali Muslims

**Religions:** Muslim 83%, Hindu 16%, other 1%

### **Languages in Bangladesh**

The official language is Bangla, also known as Bengali. It is the first language of more than 98 percent of the population. It is written in its own script, derived from that of Sanskrit. Many people in Bangladesh also speak English and Urdu.

Bangla vocabulary shows many influences. These include a strong Islamic influence seen in the greetings of "Salaam aleykum" (Peace be unto you) and "Khoda hafez" (God Bless you) and nouns from the Arab world such as "dokan" (shop), "tarik" (date), "kolam" (pen) and "bonduk" (gun). In West Bengal the Hindu influence is greater with the use of the Hindu greeting "Namashkar".

English has also had an influence on Bangla. During the days of the Raj many words of English origin such as "tebil" (table), "tiffin" (archaic in modern day English meaning snack box) entered Bangla. In more recent time the ever rising global nature of English has led to words such as "television", "telephone", "video" and "radio" being adopted by Bangla. However, unlike India, there has never been the need for English as a lingua franca and thus Bangla is the state language of Bangladesh.

### **Bangladeshi Culture & Society**

#### **Hierarchy**

- . Bangladesh is a hierarchical society.
- . People are respected because of their age and position.
- . Older people are naturally viewed as wise and are granted respect.
- . Bangladeshis expect the most senior male, by age or position, to make decisions that are in the best interest of the group. This is also valid in businesses, the majority of which will be family owned/run.

#### **Religion**

- . The majority of Bangladeshis are Muslim. However, most still very much mix this with pre-Islam folk traditions.
- . Bangladeshis identify with the folk traditions of Bengali culture. This includes belief in shamanism and the powers of fakirs (Muslim holy men who are exorcists and faith healers), ojhaa (shamans with magical healing powers), and Bauls (religious mendicants and wandering musicians).
- . There is a strong tradition of music, dance, and literature that includes classical devotions of Hindu and Muslim music.

#### **Festivals**

- . Islam defines many of the festivals in Bangladesh. These include two Eids (one after Ramadan and one after the Hajj) Shab-e-Qadr (the night of power), Milad un-Nabi (birth date of the Prophet Muhammad) and Shab-e-Barat (the night of the fortune).
- . Hindu influences festivals include Durga Puja and Kali Puja (community worshipping of Goddess Durga and Kali).
- . On the whole an entire community participates in each other's religious ceremonies.